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Effectiveness and Impact of UNDP Mine Action Support: Lessons Learned

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Field Notes

Effectiveness and Impact of UNDP Mine Action Support: Lessons Learned

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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has supported mine action in more than 40 countries since its first involvement in Cambodia in 1992. UNDP support generally focuses on the development of national mine action management capacities. In early 2016, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP concluded the first global evaluation of the results of UNDP support in mine action, with particular attention to its effectiveness and impact.[1] The evaluation reviewed documentation relating to all national, UNDP-supported mine action programs, in-depth desk reviews of support to 14 countries, and background for field case studies of three national programs (Laos, Mozambique, and Tajikistan). It also included visits to two dozen communities in Laos (n=8), Mozambique (n=11), and Tajikistan (n=5)—all of which were previously mine-affected and where demining had occurred at least five years before the evaluation visit. The evaluation highlighted several important lessons regarding effectiveness of international support in mine action and provided important nuances to the discussion of impact in mine action. UNDP management accepted the recommendations addressed to it.[2]

Origin and Development of UNDP Mine Action Support

Modern mine action began with the U.N. decision in late 1988 to train and equip Afghans living in refugee settlements in Pakistan to return to their country to clear landmines. In 1989, a U.N. coordination office was established to oversee the process, with national nongovernmental organizations (NGO) as the main operators; The HALO Trust was established as the first mine action international NGO (INGO). In 2002, the Afghanistan program was transferred to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) for implementation by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). Globally, the next mine action programs were established in Kuwait (1991) for clearance after the First Gulf War and in Central America (1992) for clearance of minefields resulting from internal conflicts. The former was conducted on a commercial basis and financed by the Kuwait government, and the Organization of American States in cooperation with national armed forces supported the latter. UNDP was not involved with any of these mine action programs.

Initial UNDP involvement in mine action was a corollary of U.N. peacekeeping missions during the first half of the 1990s (Cambodia, 1992; Mozambique, 1993; Angola, 1994). In these cases, peacekeeping missions were contracted for demining services (i.e., road access, resettlement areas, etc.) and to train local personnel as deminers. These missions did not have a mechanism to continue financing or employing trained teams beyond the life of the mission, and looked to UNDP to recruit deminers and channel funding. In each country, UNDP established specific projects and organizations for this purpose—managed by UNOPS, which has continued to implement those projects for UNDP since 1995. UNDP gained further experience on a country-by-country basis in Laos (1995), as well as with the peacekeeping missions for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia in the mid-1990s. On the groundwork of an important multicountry study in 1997, the maturing international mine action community concluded that the national mine action center should not be an operator to minimize the labor and budgetary implications—as well as potential conflicts of interest in allocation of funds—and to insulate the national (or international) authority from liabilities.[3] Other major NGOs that would have a global role in mine action joined The HALO Trust in the early 1990s: MAG (Mines Advisory Group), Handicap International (HI), and Norwegian People's Aid (NPA).

International civil society's reaction to the lasting effects of landmine contamination in the aforementioned countries led to the 1997 adoption of the *Anti-Personnel Mine Ban*

Community maps in Mozambique showing contamination drawn by women.
Photo courtesy of UNDP/Rebecca Roberts.

Convention (APMBC), transforming international mine action. First, it established an obligation for each mine-affected State Party to remove all known minefields from its territory, as well as a provision that each State Party in a position to do so would provide assistance for such efforts. Although the implication was not immediately clear to all, this implied a long-term effort to clear every mine rather than simply make each country safe. Second, the United Nations, NGOs, and commercial demining firms understood that international mine action would continue for many years, and that they should organize themselves accordingly. UNMAS and the dedicated mine action units of UNDP, UNOPS, and UNICEF were established during this period, as was the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). The International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), the dedicated Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), and the institutional model of separating the national mine action entity for operational management from that of policy, as well as separating both from field operations, are all from this period. During the first years of the APMBC until the First Review Conference in 2004, most countries with historic mine problems established national UNDP-supported programs with the exception of those coming out of immediate conflicts, which more often had UNMAS-managed programs.

Initially it was expected that UNMAS would have operational responsibility for peacekeeping mine action programs, which UNOPS would implement to provide continuity, then hand over to UNDP as each program's mission ended. This changed for several reasons:

1. There were delays in UNDP picking up some national programs.
2. UNMAS staff believed they were more effective at responding to mine problems than UNDP or national bureaucracies.
3. UNMAS involvement typically was accompanied by much greater donor resources than those UNDP could attract.

Community maps in Mozambique showing contamination drawn by men.
Photo courtesy of UNDP/Rebecca Roberts.

An effective UNMAS program during this period was in Kosovo (1999–2001), in which the U.N. Mine Action Coordination Center coordinated the technical response and resources to largely resolve the mine problem without the national government. The international staff of UNDP mine action support projects sometimes had to unlearn lessons from Kosovo in order to become mine action advisers rather than mine action managers to focus on developing national capacities to manage the respective mine action program.

National Ownership

Distinguishing the development of national ownership from the development of technical management capacity is important. UNDP has generally been successful in supporting institutionalization of national ownership—which is more comprehensive than developing national technical capacity—and projects staffed and managed by nationals. National ownership is a question of government commitment rather than of staff passports. The evaluation identified a few essential aspects of national ownership:

- Formal establishment of the national mine action entity
- Inclusion of the national mine action entity in the regular government budget
- Inclusion of mine action in the national recovery and development plan
- Adherence to key relevant treaties (e.g., APMBC)

UNDP is particularly capable of developing a formal, institutional framework for mine action. Institutional support and capacity building are aspects of most mine action support programs and are commonly carried out by GICHD, UNDP, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNMAS, bilateral donors, and also NGOs in some cases. However, in peacekeeping contexts, the presence of UNMAS is generally due to a breakdown in government capacity, and it acts in substitution of government with that role somewhat begrudgingly accepted. Governments do not change institutional structures to fit

1988-1997		1998-2004		2005-present	
UN-Managed	**UNDP**	**UN-Managed**	**UNDP**	**UN-Managed**	**UNDP**
Afganistan Angola Bosnia Croatia Mozambique Northern Iraq	Angola Bosnia Cambodia Lao PDR Mozambique	Burundi Cyprus DR Congo Iraq Kosovo Lebanon Sudan UNMEE W. Sahara	Afghanistan Albania (Armenia) Azerbaijan Bosnia Chad Colombia Croatia Eritrea Ethiopia Guinea-Bissau (Iran) Iraq Jordan Lebanon Mauritania Senegal Somalia Sri Lanka Tajikistan Thailand (Ukraine) Yemen	CAR Chad Colombia Cote d'Ivoire Darfur Liberia Libya Mali Nepal OPT Somalia South Sudan	Algeria Burundi (Cyprus) (Egypt) (Liberia) (Libya) (Malawi) (Pakistan) (Rep. of Congo) (Sudan) (Uganda) Vietnam (Zambia) (Zimbabwe)
Note: (Country) = Limited UNDP Support					

Table 1. Initiation of UN-managed and UNDP-supported mine action programs.
Figure courtesy of the authors.

the needs of a peacekeeping mission, which is generally considered to be an infringement of national sovereignty.

UNDP has not been universally successful in developing government ownership. In some cases—including Laos, Mozambique, and Tajikistan—the national mine action entity continued for more than a decade as a UNDP project without proper institutionalization or inclusion in the national budget. Although conducted in agreement between the government, UNDP, and some donors, such situations delayed essential actions for long-term sustainability and created donor doubt regarding national commitment.

Support and Development of National Mine Action Management Capacity

Based on lessons learned in the late 1990s, the evaluation team identified the key management capacities that the national mine action center requires as information management, strategic planning, quality management of operations, and resource mobilization. Expertise in each area can be developed through specific training and experience. However, trained personnel may not remain in the national entity once the international project ends.

UNDP's comparative advantage in institutional development is seen by many as not carrying over to the technical side of demining. Close working partners supplied much of the specific technical support provided under the UNDP umbrella. In the early years of UNDP mine action, UNOPS supported the implementation services and developed rosters of experts and suppliers. One or more NGOs or specialized firms then provided operational support for demining. GICHD supports operational policy development in many countries, and its advisers continue providing mine action expertise to governments supported by UNDP. The ad hoc relationship with GICHD has been particularly valuable, whereby GICHD provides technical expertise and relies on UNDP for country-level access, support, and coordinated follow-up.

Information Management

Quality of data and reporting is vital to the credibility of the national mine action program. All mine action programs and operators endeavor to maintain good records of the demining work conducted and areas of suspected contamination. In the past, personnel used a simple spreadsheet or database, but complexity grew as the amount of data increased with

surveys of suspected hazardous areas (SHA), as well as with the introduction of GIS and mapping capabilities. Database and mapping tools developed during the 1990s due to the need to record the entirety of the landmine problem and the detail of site-specific operational work—with GICHD establishing the IMSMA for UNMAS. In many cases, IMSMA was installed in parallel with conducting a Landmine Impact Survey (LIS), although some existing programs were reluctant to replace their own database systems with IMSMA.[4] GICHD provided the IMSMA software and training free of charge to mine action programs. As efforts were made to improve technical skills, IMSMA was used as the basis for strategic planning in response to the overall mine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) problem.

Development of information-management systems within government structures has been an especially difficult capacity-development challenge in many countries due to the difficulty of retaining qualified staff. The data quality and management of the system improved over time but was frequently interrupted by the loss of qualified personnel to better paying, private-sector career opportunities. These positions often received salary top-ups, and new technical personnel required fresh training on a continual basis. GICHD primarily provided technical support, with donor financing through UNDP. A continued need for technical and financial support for information management is likely, even with a well-established national mine action management entity. This is a long-term global challenge to maintain the specialized capacity required for mine action centers.

Lastly, in many programs when information-management systems were upgraded or a new baseline survey was conducted, previous data sets were set aside. For example, the 2015 mine action database in Mozambique goes back to 2008, missing the information for demining conducted during the first 15 years of the national program. This greatly reduces its usefulness for long-term development and land-use planning, for which it would be valuable as a georeferenced data set similar to ones for hazardous waste and other environmental contamination, flood plains, and earthquake hazards.

Strategic Planning and Prioritization

The global mine action community recognizes the value of strategic planning as an essential element of effective national mine action programs. Previously, programs with annual operational plans began to develop strategies that assessed the known extent of the problem, considered the level of operational activities necessary to resolve it, and projected the financial resources required to complete the task on time. The first plans were often produced with considerable input by international advisers, and in many cases, funded through UNDP. Over time, with more experience and better information, later strategic plans were more realistic and included wider national and local participation. The process of preparing APMBC Article 5 extension requests has been an important impetus to strengthen the quality and realism of national mine action plans.

Prioritization of land clearance tasks was a vital component of strategic planning. During the initial periods of peacekeeping and humanitarian emergency programs, high-priority tasks were easy to discern, and less emphasis was placed on assessing the relative importance of second-tier sites for clearance. Once emergency tasks were resolved, a large number of competing priorities with which to contend remained, bringing increased importance to prioritization. However, there was little practical guidance:

- The APMBC set clearance deadlines but provided no prioritization.
- UNMAS published a suggested set of general priorities in 1998 that included emergency assistance; settled land with high civilian casualties; land required for resettlement of IDPs and refugees; land required for agriculture; community development; access to free operation of health services; and reconstruction and infrastructure.[5]
- Demining operators sought to maximize the efficiency of their teams and equipment, and prioritized factors such as physical and seasonal access as well as suitability of minefields for available demining assets (climate, vegetation, topography, and nature of the landmine/ERW contamination). For operators, safety and ease of use took precedence over the impact on beneficiary use of the land.

Landmine Impact Surveys and Evidence-based Priority Setting

The introduction of LIS in the late 1990s was a deliberate effort to shift the practice of setting priorities based on minefield characteristics and operator capabilities to focusing on communities with socioeconomic problems caused by suspected mined areas. UNDP (together with UNMAS, UNOPS, and the Survey Working Group) was an early promoter of LIS as a means to obtain more complete information, not only of suspected mined areas, but also of their socioeconomic impacts on affected communities. LIS was carried out in heavily

A woman cultivates vegetables for consumption and market under Pylon 183.
Photo courtesy of UNDP/Rebecca Roberts.

mine-affected countries between 1999 and 2006. LIS and other impact-assessment tools were introduced to ensure that assets would have the greatest positive result for mine-affected communities. LIS increased the socioeconomic benefit of demining by focusing greater demining resources on resolution of community problems. This was done at the expense of reducing its operational efficiency by increasing the estimated size of SHAs for demining and increasing the frequency with which demining teams moved to address higher impact areas. While UNDP focused particular attention to higher socioeconomic impact areas, national governments sought demining support for infrastructure, regardless of the level of existing local socioeconomic impact.

Experience has confirmed the merits of a two-tier approach to priority-setting for demining, with national prioritization at the broad category level of blocked resources (roads, markets, water ways, farmland), coupled with the selection of specific tasks based on local needs. UNDP-supported planning processes have in some cases overemphasized local priorities, with insufficient hazard evidence. To avoid this risk, the first operational response should be precise surveying rather than clearance. As evidence-based approaches to priority setting were applied in different countries, they resulted in increased numbers of mines removed per hectare cleared and a reduction in the percentage of tasks where no mines were found. This approach was advocated for some years by GICHD, UNDP, UNMAS, UNOPS, NGOs, and with the support of donors. Over time, most programs developed a combined methodology for priority setting—partly impact, partly technical, and partly prioritization by local authorities.

National Mine Action Standards and Quality Management

National mine action standards (NMAS) form a critical part of the quality-management process, together with the operator-accreditation process, and the verification of cleared land. In countries where it has helped establish mine action programs, UNDP has supported the issuance of NMAS to guide the management and implementation process. In most countries the first NMAS were developed by an international technical adviser, who essentially adapted the IMAS (since 2001) or other existing mine action program standards (before 2001) to the country in question. The resulting first standards were nearly always in English. Over time NMAS were revised and translated into national languages. Some revisions consider national experience, although changes to global IMAS continue to drive most countries' revisions.

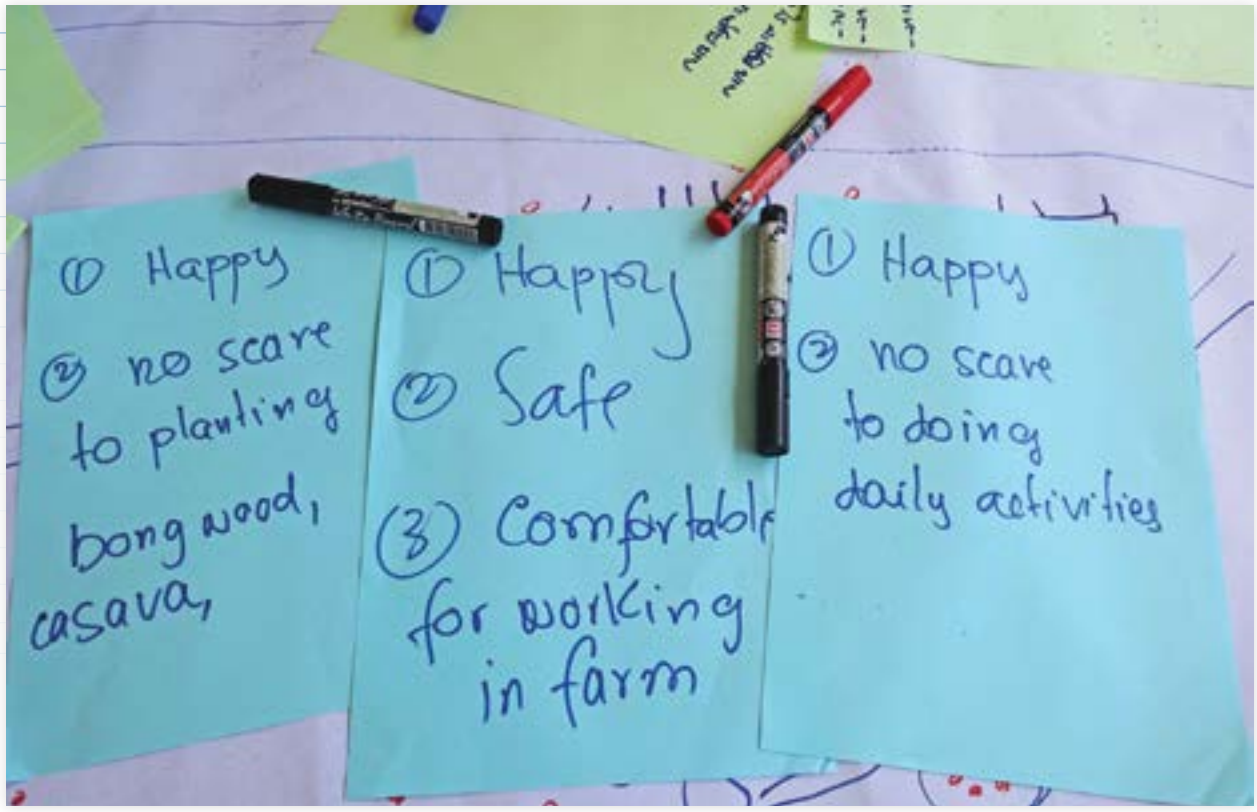
UNDP Support of and Impact on Mine Action

During the evaluation-inception phase, the team identified possible impacts from demining on local communities: improvements in household income resulting from the ability to use previously contaminated land; reduction in time required to travel to markets and service centers due to use of more direct routes; and a reduced number of new mine victims. Given UNDP's focus on marginalized populations, the team also sought to determine whether the benefits of demining were being captured by elites, for example with displacement of poorer populations that previously had accepted risk and farmed or lived in hazardous areas.

The evaluation team identified these possible impacts, recognizing the gap between UNDP **upstream** activities and actual demining carried out by operators. UNDP support is usually several steps removed from direct impact on communities and can be considered effective to the extent its actions result in greater government focus, rule-setting, and management capacity. Respectively, these can positively affect the laws and procedures set in place for demining, prioritization of areas for demining, and quality of demining results. Indeed, UNDP mine action support activities have many positive results: development of national statutes and demining strategies; trained deminers; stronger quality assurance; improved information management and greater understanding of the landmine problem; more effective use of resources; less time spent on clearance of areas without mines; greater total areas cleared, etc. These are important results, yet the evaluation deliberately focused on **downstream** changes in the living conditions of the beneficiary population, and the team endeavored to find links between UNDP mine action work and perceived benefits to local communities.

Across the 24 communities visited in Laos, Mozambique, and Tajikistan, and based on evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary evidence, the main (perceived) problems caused by mine/ERW contamination from the perspective of community members and local officials were

- The proximity of land contaminated with mines and ERW caused fear. People worried about themselves, their families (particularly children), livestock, and friends.
- Contamination interfered with freedom of movement, as mined roads affected the delivery of assistance and transport of goods, and contamination prevented children from going to school on their own.



Outcomes of the focus group discussion with beneficiaries on the impact of clearance, Asingtai (New) Village, Samouy District, Saravan Province, Laos.
Photo courtesy of UNDP/Paul Davis.

- Contamination restricted access to natural resources, impeding the collection of firewood, mushrooms, medicinal herbs, grass to make hay for animals in the winter, and water for drinking and irrigation.
- Fear, restricted movement, and restricted access all led to reduced economic opportunity and well-being—especially for mine victims—with significant long-term repercussions, such as increased vulnerability and poverty for those affected.

The principal impact on the community came from the broader sense of safety and ability to move freely throughout the area. When questioned about what had changed as a result of demining activity, local residents indicated they felt more secure and could "walk without fear." In virtually all of the communities visited, the inhabitants (male and female) reported significant safety improvements following clearance.

While community members believed that socioeconomic conditions at the community level had improved, the extent was highly variable and difficult to quantify. In most villages visited, evidence indicated improved living standards as a result of the mine action effort. Community members expressed that they could resume their normal daily activities unimpeded, farming larger plots of land or existing plots more efficiently. Farmers, who previously worked contaminated fields cautiously, were able to dig deeper with their equipment and move faster across their land, accessing water and other resources more easily. The observed economic improvements were primarily due to personal initiative rather than specific economic development or job-creation assistance from the government, the U.N. or NGOs to promote development following clearance.

Most community members who were interviewed reported that besides immediate medical attention, no support was provided for mine survivors and their families. Community members stated that in the absence of victim support, the socioeconomic conditions of mine survivors were consistently worse than they had been prior to the mine/ERW accident.

The evaluation did not find evidence that the release of previously contaminated land was a significant source of conflict. Although cleared land was generally put to use, it was not a new resource available for use by new claimants. In the countries visited, the families who traditionally used the land were known and continued to use the land before and after clearance. Where this was not the case, there was an established

procedure to allocate new land, which was applied to cleared land. Short of a land-reform process, the evidence suggests that clearance in these countries has not created a new asset to be distributed at the will of the government (or of any international actor). Although respondents in all three of the countries visited were aware of disputes over land, none of them reported that these disputes were related to cleared land.

Conclusion

The transition to national ownership of mine action in some countries aided by UNDP has been slow and inconsistent, and the sustainability of some nationally managed programs remains in question. In two of the three case countries, the national mine action entity remained UNDP projects until recently, despite decades of UNDP capacity-building support.

UNDP has sought to mainstream gender in its mine action programming, particularly through calling attention to the U.N. Gender Guidelines for Mine Action and seeking support of the Gender and Mine Action Program hosted by GICHD. Basic integration of gender in mine action is widely accepted (e.g., surveys of women as well as men for information on suspected areas; relevance of sex disaggregated data on mine victims). Nonetheless, little evidence shows that UNDP support in this area has transformed national mine action programs, and further efforts to improve gender equity are required.

The livelihood improvements evident after demining in the observed communities stemmed mostly from local initiatives, enabled by reduced risk and improved access or by specific programs sponsored by UNDP and national government partners. As mine action programs mature, they tend to become increasingly focused on poor rural communities confronted by a wide array of development challenges. Economic development and job-creation programs would benefit from including the requirements of such mine affected communities.

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The authors were the senior consultant and the IEO team leader for the evaluation. The evaluation team included additional consultants for general support (Dilnoor Panjwani of IEO) and for individual case studies (Jo Durham, Paul Davies, Rebecca Roberts, and Anna Roughley). The views expressed in this article are those of the authors, not necessarily those of IEO or any other team member.

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